

Vision for the BBT

*Bearing in mind the social values of the region
and the importance of the local economy,
we will work with other agencies, local government, conservation and
recreation organizations, agriculture, industry, and the general public.
With these partners, through natural resource management and education,
we will strive toward a common goal of ecological integrity.*

Looking Into the Future

Managing Wisconsin's natural resources requires a great deal of planning and collaboration. Members of the public, government, agencies, and organizations work with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) to make decisions about how to protect, restore, and enhance the land and water resources across the state. These planning efforts take many forms.

One such planning process is the Land Legacy Study, which was started in 2000. The Land Legacy Study is intended to identify high-priority, high-quality lands and waterways that are valued both locally and on a state level. In time, this study will be used to develop a plan for protecting the valuable land and water resources of Wisconsin.

The study began where it should, with the people of Wisconsin. Through public meetings, a questionnaire, letters, and e-mails, the WDNR discovered eight major themes of public land ownership goals and needs expressed by the public. Looking into the future, the people of Wisconsin clearly expressed that they wanted –

- ➡ Water resources to be protected.
- ➡ High-quality, unique areas to be preserved.
- ➡ Functioning ecosystems in each part of the state to be protected.
- ➡ Accessibility and usability of public lands to be maintained.
- ➡ Large blocks of land to be protected.
- ➡ Links to be created between public lands.
- ➡ Partnerships to be promoted.
- ➡ Protection strategies to be diversified (“Perspectives,” 2000).

These eight themes are lessons that will be with the WDNR as they go through many of their planning efforts. In this basin, that is especially true of the upcoming Black River State Forest (BRSF) Master Plan and the Land Legacy List, as well as future revisions of *The State of the Black-Buffalo-Trempealeau Basin*. The state will be working with local counties on the required Smart Growth, or land use planning, efforts and continuing to incorporate into WDNR work plans elements of the counties' Land and Water Resources Plans. Coordination will also continue with the “comprehensive conservation planning” initiated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in 2002 for the Upper Mississippi Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

Though the BRSF master planning process will not begin until 2003, information is already being gathered from the Bureau of Endangered Resources about rare habitats and species to be found there (Hellman,

Mission Statement

*Wisconsin Department of Natural
Resources*

To protect and enhance our natural resources: our air, land and water; our wildlife, fish and forests; and the ecosystems that sustain all life.

To provide a healthy, sustainable environment and a full range of outdoor opportunities.

To ensure the right of all people to use and enjoy these resources in their work and leisure.

To work with people to understand each other's views and to carry out the public will.

And in this partnership consider the future and generations to follow.

– “Strategic Plan,” 1999

2001). In 2003, this information will be applied to decision-making processes for things like –

- ➡ Where to build, repair, or remove facilities.
- ➡ What tracts of land should be purchased for the good of the forest and those who use it.
- ➡ How best to link these tracts with other public lands in the area to increase access.

Likewise, as WDNR staff develop the Land Legacy List identifying the priority resources to be protected, they are keeping in mind the best ways to approach the subject of protection. This does not always mean purchase of the land in question. Sometimes, this means purchasing easements or providing support to private groups interested in protecting resources. They are considering the efficient use of limited funds, working where it is feasible to connect existing public lands to increase the management potential of all lands involved.

Even this State of the Basin report is more than a tool for education. It will hopefully work to build partnerships in addition to those discussed later in “Discovering Integrated Management and Partnership Opportunities.” This report is intended to illustrate that every person in the Black-Buffalo-Trempealeau River Basin can do something to protect, restore, or enhance our land and water resources.

Because the planning efforts of the counties are done on a local governmental level, their goals tend to be tied more closely to the goals of local citizens. As the WDNR approaches its own work plans, special consideration are given to the protections, like land use planning, nutrient management, and stream or wetland preservation, outlined by the counties. Frequently, the interests of the state and county are similar and the two are able to cooperate on projects.

Work plans are intended for limited terms though – sometimes 6, 20, or 50 years – and go through many changes. In the mean time and beyond the life spans of these plans, a great deal of work needs to be done to repair what we can of the damage done by the last two centuries. Hundreds of stream miles need to be cleaned up. What remains of certain land-based natural communities and wetlands must be restored to regain and retain biodiversity.

To maintain the level of restoration that we can reach, changes need to be made in the way we respond to natural resources issues today. Best management practices should be implemented for the protection of both the land and the water in industries like agriculture, mining, and forestry as well as private individuals in their backyards. And all of the work will result in an increased determination to preserve the resources for the future.

So, How Do We Get There?

The WDNR’s role will be essentially what it has been in the past: management, preservation, restoration, and enhancement of natural resources as well as limited regulation of the use of those resources. Of growing importance to the WDNR is the educational component.

Obviously, there is not enough staff in the WDNR to manage all of the valuable resources in the state. Through education, citizens can learn how

to manage their own properties to benefit natural resources. Through education, citizen volunteers can take on some of the responsibility for natural resources work in their area. Through education, more citizens will understand the many ways that wise management and use of natural resources can benefit them in their own neighborhoods.

Partnerships will likely play a key role in this education. In this basin, the Black-Buffalo-Trempealeau Basin Partnership Team, because it is drawn from many different aspects of society, works on numerous projects at one time, and education is a major component of all of them. For example, one working group is looking at the economic impact of public lands in Jackson County so that it can educate the public about the benefits of public lands and how the resources found there can best be used. Another project is a lower Black River Project intended to protect the river's essentially wild corridor in the lower stretches. What is one great way to protect the river? Education, of course. What is *the best* way to protect the river? Leave plenty of time for public input.

Public input will be the single-most important aspect of not only a project to protect the lower Black River, but also to attaining all of the goals related to natural resources management, preservation, restoration, and enhancement. Without the input of the people of the state, a state agency does not work. Public ideas and concerns are being and will be listened to. Public concerns will be considered to the best of the WDNR's ability in all of its decisions. The public's ideas, as they work in the best interest of everyone involved, will be heeded.

Through education, partnership, listening to the public, and hard work, the WDNR will be doing its best to manage the natural resources in the Black-Buffalo-Trempealeau River Basin. In this way, the common goal of ecological integrity can be realized. According to this plan, the WDNR in the BBT will be working especially hard on:

- ⇒ Preserving our unique resources.
- ⇒ Protecting the public's health and promoting safety.
- ⇒ Improving recreational opportunities.
- ⇒ Managing watersheds to reduce water quality impacts.
- ⇒ Discovering integrated management and partnership opportunities.

References

E-mail from Allison Hellman. October 17, 2001. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Land and Forestry Team Leader, Black River Falls.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. 2000. "Perspectives on Wisconsin's Public Lands."